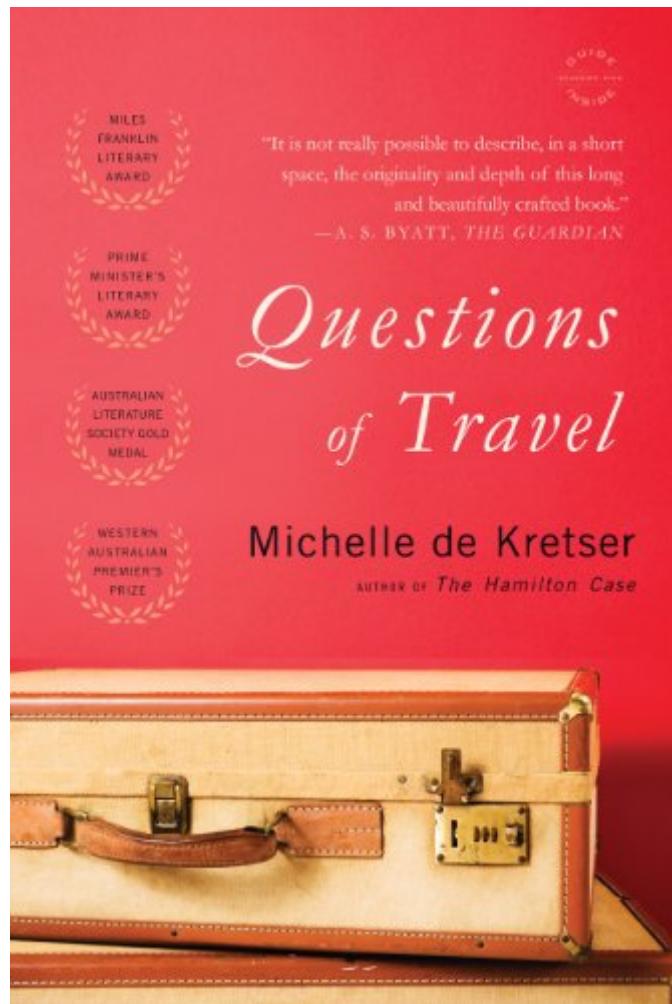


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# Questions Of Travel: A Novel



## **Synopsis**

"It is not really possible to describe, in a short space, the originality and depth of this long and beautifully crafted book."--A.S. Byatt, *Guardian* Laura Fraser grows up in Sydney, motherless, with a cold, professional father and an artistic bent. Ravi Mendis lives on the other side of the globe--exploring the seductive new world of the Internet, his father dead, his mother struggling to get by. Their stories alternate throughout Michelle de Kretser's ravishing novel, culminating in unlikely fates for them both, destinies influenced by travel--voluntary in her case, enforced in his. With money from an inheritance, Laura sets off to see the world, eventually returning to Sydney to work for a publisher of travel guides. There she meets Ravi, now a Sri Lankan political exile who wants only to see a bit of Australia and make a living. Where do these two disparate characters, and an enthralling array of others, truly belong? With her trademark subtlety, wit, and dazzling prose, Michelle de Kretser shows us that, in the 21st century, they belong wherever they want to and can be--home or away.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

I'm pretty old now. I've read a lot. Knowing life is short, I do not hesitate to abondon books that have

failed to engage me after a couple of chapters. I must admit that I wondered at first whether Questions of Travel would make the cut. It features two unprepossessing characters, utterly separated - in terms of geography, character, social milieu, race and most certainly in terms of their experience of travel - for almost all of the book. Neither is really loveable, yet I grew to love them both. The sense of each sits with me now, two weeks after finishing the book. As in The Hamilton Case, de Kretser has nailed something profound about human experience - things I have not found nailed elsewhere in fiction. In the earlier novel, it was something about how dealing with an unloveable parent can make a grown child nastier still. In this book - and I haven't processed it yet, it is all still swirling - it is something about being alone in the great world and about how it is possible to function there having no future whatsoever. It includes a cracker of a satire on a Lonely Planet-like publishing company. Forgetting the profound bits, at regular intervals these bits made me snort with laughter.

Michelle de Kretser's wonderful ideas regarding the meaning of travel. Travel as a tourist, as an escape from evil or personal pain or a quest for something more, is all dealt with here in a very skillful way. Laura, the unloved woman searching for a life, spends years traveling from one country to another and then, finding nothing, settles back into her home country. Here she travels through various relationships in a desperate attempt to find love, life and home. Ravi, the refugee from Sri Lanka travels to escape savagery and enormous grief and finds there is no relief, especially amongst those who, from lack of similar experiences, would never understand. The story is told as a tandem tale where life is shown as a journey back to the beginning. The protagonists barely meet but end up in the same place - exactly where they started from. A beautiful and poetic read.

I don't think so. I'm pleased she doesn't read reviews because if she did she wouldn't like this one. I struggled to keep myself interested until the male character (one of two main characters) appeared. Thank goodness for the few Australians who tried to help Ravi settle in Australia. The political undertones together with the subtle references to Australian humour kept me entertained. The characterization of the traveler kept me bored and disinterested until with a bit of maturity she had the gumption to express herself at the electoral box and (I hope many Australians will think and do the same) with it came the realization that she could control her life. Living happily ever after with a man just because he had declared his love for her was not the answer she needed. I found the ending not at all surprising, just simplistic.

I found this book quite difficult to "get in to", but there were enough parts that I enjoyed to keep reading. I think I have learnt a lot about Sri Lanka, its politics and the experiences that some refugees have been through. Whilst I could understand Ravi's character, I found it difficult to relate to Laura. I was trying to work out how it would end, and whilst I could never have predicted the actual end, I also thought it came too quickly. Still, a message is there, I think, about the importance of family and having a sense of belonging, and how sad someone's life can be without that, and how important that sense of love is in coping with what life dishes out. I will probably read other books by Michelle de Kretser, but I think I need a break before I do so. The ideas and language used in the book are interesting, but at times it seemed clunky with an odd idea thrown up and then not explored to a conclusion.

My first time reading De Kretser and I'm hooked. The novel tracks two different people and their relationship with travel: escapist, urgent, superficial, unwanted. It is particularly evocative for anyone who has ever travelled alone and for too long, wondering what the hell they are doing here. More than that, you feel enormously for the two protagonists, who don't meet until late in the book. The parts set in Sri Lanka are confronting and are meant to be. I don't think anyone can look at an asylum seeker in the same way after reading this. But I also am haunted by Laura Fraser, an unconventional heroine whose journeying is generally internal. As much as we experience we can never hope to express. So, poor Laura remains unknown by her friends and family, but not to us. A beautiful book but not always a happy one.

This book has two intertwined stories with the two main characters from different parts of the world. Due to tragedies, both of the main characters lose their sense of connectedness in life and spend the rest of their lives floating. One story is very confronting about people vulnerable to those seeking power at any cost including a willingness to commit atrocities, intimidate and terrify the community. The traumatized victims are at the mercy of those who offer conditional help after having their perverse needs met first. I pushed myself to finish the book but it was a depressing and bleak view of the world with nothing redemptive. I've read other books like "Burial Rites" that are bleak and depressing but I felt an empathy and connection with the characters in that book that I didn't feel in this book.

Definitely not a run of the mill read. A unique insight into a diverse universe of willing and not willing travellers. Many mythologies are exposed about what leaving home entails and what happens when

a traveller, albeit a political refugee or voluntary or permanent guest, actually decides to stay in a place like Australia. The author intelligently and with enormous sympathy evokes the stunning disconnect between people's assumptions about each other and minutely explores the myriad of kindnesses ( and unkindnesses) done in a place where the vegetation might look familiar..but that is about all that is not strange.Often brutally vivid so take care.

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